

# Turkmenistan

## Shageldy Atakov Released!

Baptist prisoner of conscience Shageldy Atakov was released on January 8, 2002, one year before completing his four year prison sentence for trumped-up charges of swindling.

Mr. Atakov, a lay preacher and convert to Christianity, endured terrible torture, including forced drug treatment, and suffered from major health

problems during his imprisonment; government officials also threatened to take away his children. International pressure *does* help get prisoners released!

*Letters of commendation and thanks can be sent to His Excellency Saparmurat Niyazov, President of Turkmenistan, c/o His Excellency Meret Orazov, Ambassador, Embassy of Turkmenistan, 2207 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.*



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## Human Rights Update

Congressman Joe Pitts

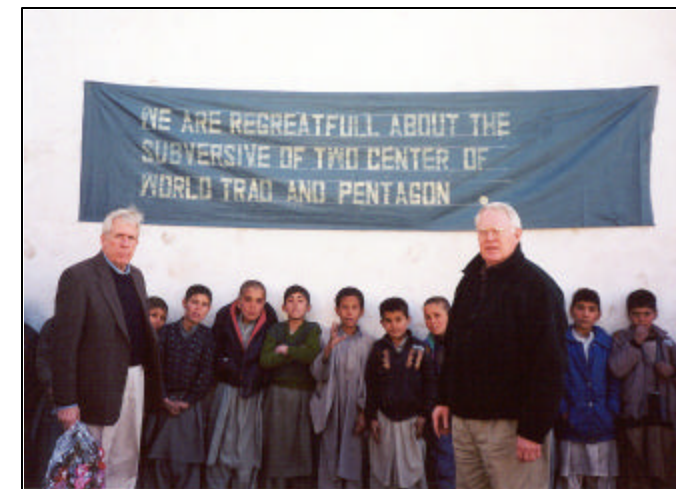
March, 2002

## Afghanistan

In January, I traveled to Afghanistan with my colleagues Rep. Frank Wolf (R, VA) and Rep. Tony Hall (D, OH). We were greeted with warm, friendly smiles wherever we went, from meetings with Interim Administration officials to hospitals, schools and orphanages. There is a hope in Afghanistan that the country will be different and new opportunities will emerge out of the terrible suffering the Afghan people have endured.

Nevertheless, the visit was sobering. The best children's hospital in the nation lacked basic medicines to treat the children. Two children and their mothers shared each bed. One of three children in the malnutrition ward died each night. They lack basic medical equipment and no hospital employees have been paid for six months. Yet, the doctors and nurses worked valiantly to save the lives of the children in their care.

We visited a girls' school, the Dorkhanai High School, which had re-opened one week earlier after being shut down for over five years. The concrete building was full of bullet holes from the Soviet invasion, one room had no roof, and there was no glass in any of the



Congressman Frank Wolf and I posed in front of this banner at the Kabul orphanage. After years of war, there are hundreds of thousands of orphans in Afghanistan.

windows. The girls sat on blankets on the concrete or dirt floor as there were no desks or chairs. The students were so eager to go to school that they raised money from their families' meager earnings to buy thick plastic to cover the windows and kerosene to keep out the biting cold. The girls greeted us with big smiles and chants of "Welcome! Welcome!" They were delighted to be back in school. Teachers need to be re-hired (80% of the teachers were women), and the government needs assistance with providing basic supplies such as paper, pens, chalk, and books.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is almost overwhelming. Much of the population lacks food, medicine, and shelter. Yet, there is hope –

hope that the American people will cement their friendship with the Afghan people by remaining engaged in their country. Government aid to Afghanistan is vital, but people-to-people diplomacy and sister relationships between schools and hospitals will be valuable in helping to rebuild Afghanistan and the historic friendship between our nations.

Our meetings with government officials also gave us hope. The Chairman of the Interim Administration, Hamid Karzai, is an impressive, capable, straightforward man who has the capacity to lead his country by establishing a coalition that will last through the historic transitions the nation is experiencing. The *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly) scheduled for June will mark a key transition for the people of Afghanistan, one that the whole world hopes will lead at last to a true democracy.



For more on Afghanistan see:  
[www.house.gov/pitts/afghan.htm](http://www.house.gov/pitts/afghan.htm)



# Burma

**March 10, 2003 is the annual Global Day of Prayer for Burma** The Day of Prayer began after a visit by Rev. David Eubank of Christians Concerned for Burma with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest since the military dictatorship took over in Burma after the 1990 elections. Rev. Eubank promised her that he would urge people around the world to pray for her and for the people of Burma.

**For more on Burma see: [www.prayforburma.org](http://www.prayforburma.org)**

**A Karenni man, killed by the government police in Burma. The plight of Burma's ethnic minorities is one of the world's least-known human rights causes.**



# Indonesia

As many of you may have read in news reports, over the past few years, the Christians and Muslims in the Spice Islands of Indonesia have dealt with violence at the hands of Muslim extremists, particularly from Laskar Jihad, an extremist group that is suspected to have ties with Al Qaeda and its worldwide network. Terrible reports of destruction of villages, murder, forced conversions and forced circumcision of women,

children and men have been shared with NGOs traveling in the region. Statistically, it is predominantly the Christian communities that have suffered at the hands of the extremist Laskar Jihad network, however some Muslim villages that have refused to support their plans have also been attacked. The Indonesian government has been slow to help bring positive solutions to the problems. In fact there are reports that members of the Indonesian military have helped escalate the bloody conflicts. According to reports, some members of the military have helped supply weapons to both

sides. The suffering of thousands of Indonesians continues and the health concerns of the thousands of displaced persons is increasing.

**For more on Indonesia see: [www.jubileecampaign.org](http://www.jubileecampaign.org)**

**Letters of concern requesting that the Indonesian government bring an end to the violence perpetrated by Laskar Jihad in Indonesia against Christians and Muslims can be directed to Her Excellency President Megawati Sukarnoputri, President of the Republic of Indonesia, c/o His Excellency Soemadi D.M. Brotodiningrat, Ambassador, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036**

**Visit Congressman Pitts' Human Rights Page at [www.house.gov/pitts/rights.htm](http://www.house.gov/pitts/rights.htm)**



**After burning down a church in Indonesia, Muslim extremists wrote "Kill all the Christians" on the building's wall.**

# Western Sahara

Unfortunately, the implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan and the Houston Accords still are not in place. The delay in holding a referendum over Western Sahara and bringing an end to the 26-year-old conflict continues to be perpetuated due to apparent lack of political will on the part of the United Nations to follow through on their commitments.

The International Court of Justice ruled in 1975 in support of

the Western Saharan people's right to self-determination and against Morocco's claims to the territory. Unfortunately, Morocco continues to change its position and create various obstacles to the referendum. The people of Western Sahara continue to suffer in refugee camps or in areas under Moroccan control, where they are oppressed by the Moroccan police and security officials. Also, there are very disturbing reports that the Moroccan Government signed contracts with foreign companies for exploration of resources in the Territory of Western Sahara. The UN legal opinion on these economic actions in Western

Sahara, an opinion sent by the UN Legal Department to the UN Security Council, states that Morocco does not have sovereignty over Western Sahara nor rights of legal administration. In addition, the Opinion underlines that any exploitation of the resources of the Western Sahara without the consent of the people of Western Sahara is in violation of international law.

The people of Western Sahara continue to press for a free, fair and transparent referendum and continue to hope that they can leave the refugee camps and return to their homes to live in peace and safety.

# China

After decades of communist suppression of both indigenous and western religions, millions of people in the world's largest country are rediscovering religion.

From Falun Gong to the rapid spread of Christianity, religion is alive in China.

But adherents of sects not officially sanctioned by the government continue to live in fear. A recently uncovered Chinese government document instructed officials to "carefully gather all the information and try to catch all the members in one blow. Pay attention to keep it confidential and work without talking...we need to work more and talk less and smash the cult quietly."

China's response to international pressure appears to be greater secrecy instead of reforms.

Congressman Pitts was recently appointed to Congress' new China Commission, where he will have a key role in working for more freedom in China.



**The Sahrawi people of Western Sahara lost their country in 1975. Half of them still live at home, but under Moroccan domination. The other half, like this boy, live in refugee camps in the middle of the Sahara desert.**

*To urge the United Nations to hold the referendum for the people of Western Sahara, please write to His Excellency Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, United Nations, New York, NY 10017*

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**Congressman Pitts' Annual Human Right Conference**

**Calvary Church  
1051 Landis Valley Road  
Lancaster, Pennsylvania  
Saturday, June 15  
8:00 A.M. to Noon**

